

Demon Twins

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Summary: "Speaking of which." Kanami turned her silver eyes on Chizuru. "Remember this, Yukimura Chizuru. Your father will return you to your rightful place at the head of the Yukimura family, with or without your consent. When my sister and I come to retrieve you, be ready. If they stand in our way, we'll slaughter them all" -spelling of character names may be slightly different-

1. Preface

That's the last of them. Let's go." Hajime tossed another dead soldier to the side as Kondou called out to them. His chief's voice was thick with regret. Something had happened.

"What's up, Kondou? Why are are pulling out without cleaning up?" Shinpachi asked as he sheathed his sword.

"We...we've lost too many good people" Kondou was avoiding the question, turning to Hijikata. "We move out with the men here. Let's go"

Hikikata nodded signalling the others to move. They fell back, heading for the gates and cutting a path through the men helping wounded soldiers. An explosion wracked the captains as several kegs of gun powder caught fire nearby. They ducked, shielding themselves from shrapnel. Hajime caught the look on the Commander's face as they ran. Pain, though he wasn't injured. They hadn't had time to check who was among the death toll...and they'd remained together through the battle. Neither of them could be sure who had died...so why was he so obviously hurt?

"Wait" Souji stopped just as they moved out of the complex. "Kondou...where are they?"

"I don't know who you mean, Souji" The chief was being evasive.

Hajime looked back to Souji, taking in the pained recognition in the other man's eyes. Harada and Heisuke shared a look, their eyes equally troubled. Hijikata refused to meet their eyes.

"Don't lie to me, Kondou. Where are they?" Souji clenched his fist. "Where're Kanami and Kira?"

Dread settled in the pit of his stomach as Hajime realized what had unsettled them. The two girls had accompanied them on this mission, they'd wanted to free the town from the group of bandits just as much as their own group of samurai did. In fact, Kira had eagerly trailed after Harada when they'd entered the complex; her sword drawn and ready for blood. The two being had been separated from them near the start of the battle when Kondou had ordered them to evacuate several children the bandits had taken captive.

"I'm sorry, Souji..." Soji's eyes widened as their chief gave a saddened nod of his head. "They...They died honorably"

"What?" Souji's eyes flared wide as he processed what had happened. "How...why..."

Hajime understood his pain. He had also been close to the twin girls that had so eagerly joined their battles. Kira, the older of the two girls, was talented and skilled with her sword. He'd often worked with her while Harada helped her younger sister, Kanami, practice with a spear. To think that the two women were gone was enough to drive a thorn into his chest.

" One of the men we captured had been severely injured. He told us that two women had killed his companions while assisting a group of captives. They were assisting the children as they were ordered to. Several of the bandits decided to take advantage of their distraction. Kira died protecting her sister...and Kanami died giving the prisoners a chance to escape. He was the only one to pursue them that survived. "

Silence fell over the captains as the realization settled in. Kira and Kanami Ojikashi, two brilliant young girls who'd wanted to experience real combat, had died under their watch. Though the two weren't much younger than Hajime, many of them had thought of the two girls as younger sisters. Souji had been especially attached to Kanami.

"We'll bury them with the others" Kondou's voice was heavy and Hajime watched the tear that rolled down his cheek. "They'll be honored"

Souji fell silent, his fist clenched and eyes shut tight. Both Harada and Shinpachi were glaring back at the complex gates. Sanan had fallen silent, but he was giving Hijikata a scolding look. Kondou had collected himself, and was now looking over the captains in front of him.

"Saito" Kondou turned his gaze to Hajime. "I want you to remain here. Look for their weapons, Kira's sword and Kanami's spear. There is no worse fate for a warrior to be left without their weapon"

"Of course" Hajime nodded, turning away from the group and heading for the complex. Shinpachi stopped him before he could fully leave

them. The man had fallen behind the other captains.

"I know it's not your thing to do something like this..." Shimpachi took a deep breath. "But if you find something of Kanami's...could you get it for Souji? He um...he's not going to accept her death very easily. Do the same for Kira if you can"

"I will" Hajima nodded, waiting for Shimpachi to walk away before turning back to the gates.

He walked through the men, giving a direct order to Yamazaki to look for the two women. They'd been guarding the children and adult prisoners, escorting them toward the back gates to the complex. He turned a corner, reaching the cell that Kondou had found. He'd ordered the girls from here...the last place the captains had seen them alive. With another sighed he looked up, finding the route the girls would have taken. Kira was too clever to lead them straight into danger. She would have skirted the complex perimeter, looking for a place where the wall that surrounded it had fallen in. Once she'd found it she would have pushed Kanami through first, then sent the children over, followed by the few adult prisoners. Kira herself would have remained behind, guarding their escape while Kanami got their charges safely into the woods.

Hajima sighed as he found the first break in the wall. The rubble wasn't too loose and would have made it easy enough for children and injured adults to climb over it. According to Kondou, Kira would have made it this far before she died, protecting Kanami who would have been stationed on the other side of the wall. Chances were her body would be nearby while Kanami's would be on the other side, near the woods or on the path that lead into it.

A glint of sunlight off metal caught his eye as he stepped onto one of the sturdier bits of rock. Kira's sword lay abandoned, its blade partially stuck beneath the body of a bandit. The purple and pink wrapping around it's hilt was stained with blood, as was the golden silk tassel that hung from the bottom. He remembered Souji teasing her about the decorative quality of the blade, just before she disarmed him and held it to his throat with a smirk.

"Where are you Kira?" Hajime asked himself as he bent, pulling the sword out from under the corpse. He wiped it clean with the hem of the dead man's shirt, smiling softly at the cold metal in his hand. It was her dearest treasure, matched with the sheath she'd loved so much. It had to be nearby...probably still with her body unless a bandit had taken it for what it was worth. The sword remained in his hand as he climbed up the rubble, dropping onto the ground below the wall. There was no sign of either girl here, despite a spattering of blood on the ground. The bodies of three more bandits covered the ground, nearly concealing the glimmer of black and silver on the ground. He took the cord from the ground. It had been right underneath the sword and sheath in Kira's possession. A silver pendent, depicting the image of an owl, hung on a black leather cord. Kira had worn it tied around her waist after Harada had given it to her. To have it here, the ends clearly cut, meant that she had indeed made it over the wall.

"She made it here without her sword" Hajime said to himself as he tied the pendent and cord around the hilt of her sword. "She wore the daggers today then"

He proceeded further down the path they'd taken. Blood had dripped into the grass, dying the green a sickly red. One of the girls had been injured...probably Kira for her to leave her sword behind in favor for one of her one-handed daggers. She'd been too injured to swing a sword. Kira had undoubtedly known she'd bleed out before they'd saved the children and had decided to follow her sister to protect them. He had no doubt that Kira had known she was dying.

Hajime found Kanami's spear at the entrance to the forest path. It lay in a pool of blood, covering the ornate hilt of a dagger he recognized instantly. It was Kira's favorite, the hilt decorated with pressed, black leather and wrapped in silk cord. She'd treasured the weapon, refusing to let anyone else touch it. The spear was typical of Kanami, black and silver, the blade sharpened to a point. She'd purposely had it made this way, trading a long spear for the shorter one now. Though it appeared normal, Hajime knew she'd made it only just short enough that Harada couldn't use it without difficulty, taking the measure after he'd used it to defeat her during a training session. He had now found two of Kira's weapons and one of Kanami's...but no bodies.

As he stood up, the spear and dagger joining the sword he'd collected, he caught sight of the glimmer of silver a few feet away. Like Kira, Kanami had worn a silver pendent around her neck. Hers was a small turtle, a gift from Harada after she'd protested that he favored her sister. This would be what he gave to Souji, though he doubted it would bring him much comfort.

"It cannot be helped, Yamazaki" He sighed as the man stepped onto the path just behind them. "Were their bodies already collected?"

"No." Yamazaki frowned, shaking his head. "We told the other men to search out here, but they weren't found. Neither of the girls...though their weapons were not found either...but you seem to have them"

Hajime looked off into the woods, his heart sinking further. "Please forgive me Kira...Kanami. We have failed you"

2. Chapter 1

Chizuru sat back with a sigh as she handed the last cup of hot tea to Heisuke. He took it gratefully, a small smile crossing his face as he took a sip. The other captains eyed the two of them slowly, their eyes alight with humor as they prepared the onslaught of teasing that would undoubtedly follow. Before they could speak, the door slid open violently, letting Kondou step in with a furious look. Hijikata followed after him with Inoue. Both were tense and pale, their eyes revealing nothing.

"What's up?" Harada instantly stiffened at the look on Kondou's face.

The other captains seemed to echo his concerns as they all turned to their Chief with sullen looks. Even Saito had left his usually placid demeanor and was looking at Hijikata questioningly.

"You won't believe this...I've only just heard it myself from our contacts in the east." Kondou took a deep breath as he seated himself at the head of the room.

Chizuru quickly poured another three cups of tea, handing them out to the newcomers. Inoue gave her a thankful smile as she did so. Hijikata and Kondou barely acknowledged her as they accepted their tea. Kondou took an unsteady sip before looking back to the captains.

"There are rumors saying that a man matching Koudou's description has employed the services of two young girls, both skilled in combat. They are said to fight by sword and spear..." Kondou revealed, watching the reactions of the others.

"And?" Okita shrugged. "I'm sure there are plenty of girls who can fight"

"There's more" Hikikata shared a look with Kondou. "We dug further into the rumors...and found witnesses. Apparently they're twins around Hajime's age. But what concerned us most was that one of the two fights one-handed with a sword...and both of them go by the name Ojikashi"

Chizuru jumped at the sudden shattering of a cup. Okita had dropped his, sending tea and broken glass spattering across the floor. The others were tense, their eyes wide as they stared at their commander. Okita's fist was clenched, blood dripping from a wound between his thumb and forefinger. He had squeezed the glass so hard it broke.

"There's no way in hell" He sputtered, eyes furious. "There's just no way"

"They can't be alive...We...They" Heisuke was almost trembling.

"Who can't be alive?" Chizuru spoke up boldly, her voice breaking a tense silence.

Okita stood up harshly, ignoring a soft protest from Nagakura as he left. Heisuke ignored her question as he stared at his clenched hands, mirroring the expression on Harada's face. Saito's hand had gone to the hilt of his sword, tracing a finger over it, clearly deep in thought. Even Hijikata refused to answer her as he shared a sad look with Sannan. She glanced around at them, worried for her friends.

"You know I can't allow you to chase after this rumor" Kondou was looking directly at Harada and Saito. "But I wanted to tell you myself before you heard rumors. We are investigating it of course..."

"We never found them after that battle...could they have really survived?" Sannan looked to Hikikata. "We suspected they'd been gravely wounded."

"If they'd survived they would have returned to us when they could. There's no way they would have just left" Hijikata let out a sharp sigh. "We have no clue what happened, however. As Sannan said, we never found their bodies. And Saito found no trace of them besides

the weapons and their pendants."

"Saito, Harada" Kondou interrupted. "Keep an eye on Souji."

The two of them nodded, standing up to leave with Shinpachi and Heisuke. Sannan and Hikikata stayed seated with Kondou as Inoue waved for Chizuru to follow him. She got to her feet slowly, following him into the hall. Inoue was watching Saito and Harada's retreating features sadly, his face betraying his concern.

"Let's go for a walk, Yukimura" Inoue said with a slight smile as he turned his attention back to her.

"Okay" She followed after him as he lead her toward the central courtyard. They paused under a tree, Inoue leaning against a large boulder there. His eyes were focused on something in the distance.

"The women they were talking about are Kira and Kanami Ojikashi, two young women who fought along side the Shinsengumi for years. They were never actual members, but they were close friends with the captains. Both were orphaned at a young age after their clan was brutally murdered by rebels. Kondou took them in, taught them to fight...well actually Saito and Harada taught them to fight. They...well...they were especially close to Souji, Saito, and Harada." Inoue sighed. "They died years ago. Or so it would seem. We never found their bodies, though Saito found Kira's sword and dagger, and Kanami's spear. He'd also brought back two items they'd always kept with them. I couldn't tell you where those things are now...but I believe Souji has one of them. Saito or Harada may have the other"

"They...they died?" Chizuru covered her mouth, surprised by the sudden acknowledgement.

"Yes" Inoue nodded. "Their deaths shook Souji badly. I doubt Saito and Harada were as unaffected as they seemed. The possibility of them living may just be too much for Souji to handle at this point, though we can't be sure." He looked at Chizuru with a sad smile. "It's been six years since then. If they were alive, they'd be just a little younger than Saito."

"So then...do you think..." She swallowed hard. "Do you think my father really does have them?"

"We can't be sure" Chizuru jumped at the new voice, turning to find Saito standing just behind her with Harada and Nagakura. "Koudou was still working closely with us then...so there's a chance he would have know about them. He was also in the area during that battle. Kondou is considering the possibility that Koudou took them with him. Though they would have been less than cooperative."

"Kira never did trust him" Harada shook his head. "And Kanami wouldn't have gone willingly without her sister"

"If it is them...what will you do?" Chizuru asked.

Their current task hung in the air between them. The Shinsengumi were after Koudou Yukimura, tasked with killing him for the new form of Fury he'd sent against human kind. If he'd employed the two girls in

his service, they might have been forced to fight them.

"It will be as it always is" Saito broke the tension. "If the women the rumors speak of are Kira and Kanami, we will have no choice but to kill them if they interfere."

Nagakura rubbed the back of his neck. "Our problem is Souji. If it is them...there's no guarantee he'll be as pliant to his duty as Shinsengumi...or as your protector, Chizuru"

"If Kanami and Kira are helping Koudou...if they try to attack us or hurt Chizuru. I'll kill them. That's all there is to it" The group's eyes were drawn to the doorway of a nearby building. Okita stood facing them, his hand clenched and a long, black cord hanging from the close fist. His eyes were hard as he looked at Saito and Nagakura. "But there is no way I'm not taking a chance to try and find out what happened back there"

Saito and Nagakura nodded.

"Besides. I have something of Kanami's that she's probably missing" Harada held up a black cord similar to the one in Okita's hand, a silver pendent hanging from it.

"And Kira wouldn't take the loss of her sword nicely" A soft smile slid across Saito's face.

"Guess you won't have to wait long to give them back then" A feminine voice rang out across the clearing.

3. Chapter 2

She remembered many things about the day she was reborn. She remembered the sudden order from their Chief first of all, remembered the tight expression on his face as he faced them. He hadn't wanted to send the two of them alone, but Kanami had insisted. They would lead their charges away from the bulk of the fighting, protect them until they were well on their way toward the neighboring village, then head back to regroup. She remembered the worried expression Sanosuke had given her as he hugged her to his chest. Hajime had reached up and brushed her lilac colored hair from her face before sharing one of his rare smiles. Even Hijikata was troubled as Souji touched her sister's face softly. They'd reassured them with a few words and then turned away.

It was the last time she'd seen them. The last time she'd gotten to share Hajime's rare warmth or hear the strong rumble of Shinpachi's voice. Kanami had taken up the lead as they left, leaving Kira to usher the many children and three women toward the corner of the building. As she'd followed, she'd brought her hand up to wave goodbye to Souji and Sanosuke as they lingered behind. She hadn't seen their response as she'd turned the corner, drawing her sword and giving Kanami a hard look.

She remembered reaching the break in the wall without trouble. Kanami had climbed over first, lifting down the children one by one after dispatching two bandits. Kira had lingered behind, watchful as the children and then the women that were with them climbed over. She'd been forced to attack the three men that tried to intercept them,

cutting two throats before the third finally dealt a blow. The gash was deep in her right side. Her sword fell as she grabbed his, using his own blade to slash open his stomach. Fear settled in Kira's stomach as she checked the wound, it was too deep. The gash would limit her movement, preventing her from using the sword. She'd left it there, trapped under a bandit's body, and withdrew a dagger from the concealed sheath at her thigh. She could use daggers with her left hand, and she'd be able to move quicker with it.

Kira didn't tell Kanami about the wound as she dropped to the ground next to her sister. She'd shushed her protests, telling her the sword had been left in the enemy's chest. She reassured her sister, telling her she'd retrieve it later or that one of their companions would. Her name was stamped into the cold metal of her blade after all. And the others knew what it looked like. She couldn't bring herself to reveal the severity of her wound. She'd taken the packet of medicine from its hidden place in the ribbon tied around her upper arm. The powdered herbs numbed her nerves. She wouldn't feel herself die.

They'd run toward the woods, taking as much caution as they could. The captives had gotten onto the path when several bandits dropped down from the top of the wall. She'd held her dagger ready as Kanami readied her spear. Her sister would be fine, she had to be. Kira had to make sure to send her back to Souji in one piece. She could survive, even if Kira had to die here.

The first man to reach them met the end of her blade, his blood staining the grass at her feet as his sword dropped. Kanami's skill was unmatched as she'd cut through three more of the men. There were four remaining, closing in as Kira's vision blurred. She'd lurched forward with a cry of her sister's name, taking the hit from a blade that would have hit Kanami. The sword slid cleanly into her stomach, almost all the way through. Kanami cried out, killed the man, and stood in front of Kira as she laid in the grass. Her final thoughts had been of Hajime and Sanosuke, how they would react to her death...

Kira woke with a start, her eyes wide as she took in the dark room. She was soaked in sweat from the dream, one hand on the sword that rested to her left. She traced the patterns on its sheath as she caught her breath, willing her thoughts not to stray back to the dream. It had been a recurring nightmare for weeks now, replaying the day she'd "died" over and over again. More often now that she knew their current orders.

Turning on her side, Kira glanced at the futon that should have held her sleeping sister. It was empty and cold, having not been slept in. Where could Kanami be at this hour? The sun hadn't even risen yet. She rose to her feet, slipping into her shoes as she stepped out into the hallway. Koudou would be asleep at this hour, having spent the majority of his day developing the new fury serum. There was no reason for Kanami to be up.

"Kanami?" She called down the hallway, her voice hushed to prevent waking any of the men in the surrounding rooms. Her sword remained sheathed, though she'd carried it with her.

"Did I wake you?" Kanami emerged from a nearby room, the darkened hallway shading her face.

"Why are you awake? Did something happen?" Kira asked slowly, unsure of her sister's demeanor.

"Nothing. I just completed our mission since I couldn't sleep" Kanami's voice was cheerful as she slid the door shut with a soft click.

"Finished our..." Kira froze as the realization hit her. They were to give a message to Koudou's daughter, a young woman shielded by the Shinsengumi. "Kanami?"

Her sister stepped into the light cast by a nearby candle. Kira held back a gasp as she caught sight of her. Kanami's pristine white kimono had been spattered with red, blood covering almost all of it. Her spear was held tightly in a bloodied arm, it's blade dripping scarlet to the floor.

"Did you...did they" Kira held her breath as Kanami took another step toward her, a malicious smirk on her face.

"Three of them got in my way." She smirked.

"Who" Kira was breathless as her right hand went to the hilt of her sword, pulling it out a few inches.

Please let them be okay.

"One is dead." Kanami smiled. "Two were injured, I took the courtesy to knock one of them out instead of killing him"

"Kanami" Kira summoned her confidence back. "Did you kill one of them?"

"The captains of the Shinsengumi are alive, injured but alive" Kanami smirked as she brushed past her older sister.

What is happening to us...

4. Chapter 3

Chizuru looked to the top of the wall, confusion written across her face. A young woman was sitting there, her legs crossed one over the other as she looked down at them with cold, silver eyes. Her lilac hair was tied to one side, not unlike Saito's and she was dressed in a white kimono. From where she was standing Chizuru could see the long spear on her back. The woman smirked as she took in the shock on the faces of the Shinsengumi captains.

"What? So surprised that I'm not as dead as you left me to be?" She dropped down from the wall, landing easily on her feet.

"Kanami" Okita's eyes had flared wide as he saw her. "I didn't think it was possible"

"It's nice to see you're still as pretty as ever, Souji" She crossed her arms over her chest. "But how do you know I'm Kanami? I could be Kira for all you'd know. Things change a lot in six years"

"Kira doesn't fight with a spear" Saito's voice was cold, his eyes narrowed. "And she's right handed"

"I suppose you'd know, Hajime." The smirk on Kanami's face spread into a malicious grin. "You know, she still calls out for the two of you in her sleep sometimes. Sanosuke! Hajime! Help me. Yours too Shinpachi. Every once in a while anyway." She laughed to herself. "She did that when she died too. She thought you might come save us...but we were wrong, weren't we?"

Saito tensed as Nagakura audibly growled. "Chizuru, get back. Go find Hijikata and the others"

Chizuru moved to obey, gasping when a hand closed around her arm and yanked her back. Kanami had used the the back edge of her spear to knock Inoue back and seized Chizuru, all in the same movement. The captains present unsheathed their weapons, preparing for their attack.

"Now now. I don't want to play with everyone just yet" Kanami smiled, twirling the spear between her fingers. "I need Kira for that, so I can see the look on your faces as the precious little girl you cared so much about slits your throats."

"Let her go, Kanami" Okita's voice wavered as he stepped down into the grass, sword pointed at Kanami.

"That's not very nice of you, Souji. I thought I mattered more than that" Kanami snickered. "Besides. I don't intend to hurt her. Koudou just wants me to pass on a message. We still need her alive"

"I said let her go" Okita lunged, slashing his sword in a long arch toward Kanami.

The woman shoved Chizuru forward, dodging backwards to escape the blow. Her spear swung around, pointing at Souji as he recovered from the missed swing. Saito gently took Chizuru's arm, nudging her behind himself and Nagakura "Go, Chizuru"

"On second thought. Maybe I will have to kill her. I'm sure Koudou's son will suffice for expanding the clan." Kanami slashed at Okita, forcing him back a few steps, the momentum of her swing brought her fully around long enough to stab at Inoue as he attacked from behind. "It isn't polite to sneak up on a lady"

Chizuru screamed as Inoue fell, blood seeping into his clothes. Kanami stepped away from the growing pool, her eyes sparkling. "Pity. I didn't actually want to kill anyone. Ah well, it can't be helped"

"You little bitch" Okita attacked again, slashing out before she could dodge.

Kanami stepped away from him as a line of scarlet formed on her cheek. She made a slight noise in her throat, swinging the spear around to catch him in the shoulder. He stumbled forward enough for her to bring a harsh hand down to the back of his neck, knocking him out cold. Kanami sighed to herself. "I see you haven't changed. Always too impulsive to judge the person you're striking." She brought the sleeve of her kimono up to wipe the blood from her cheek.

"Please tell me the two of you are smarter than that. I'd hate to be the one to tell Kira that I had to kill you"

"Where is she" Saito asked, his voice unwavering as he looked at Kanami with an even gaze.

"I left Kira back at headquarters, unfortunately" Kanami smiled. "She's a bit too soft for this particular mission. I thought she might decide to go easy on you. My older sister lets her emotions take over too easily. In fact, she almost decided to tell Koudou that Miss Chizuru was no longer with the Shinsengumi. So I took the opportunity to do this myself"

Saito's grip on his sword tightened as Nagakura moved forward. He slashed out at her, just barely catching her arm. She glared at him, using the shaft of her spear to knock him off his feet and then the blade to clip his shoulder.

"Idiot" She scolded with a laugh. "I'm not the clumsy little girl Harada taught to fight. I know how to kill you and I will if need be. Unlike my sister, I haven't gone soft" Blood stained her kimono and its tie as the liquid dripped from her blade.

"Chizuru, whatever you do. Stay behind me" Saito said firmly as Chizuru took a few steps backward, watching in horror as Nagakura got to his feet.

"Speaking of which." Kanami turned her silver eyes on Chizuru. "Remember this, Yukimura Chizuru. Your father will return you to your rightful place at the head of the Yukimura family, with or without your consent. When my sister and I come to retrieve you, be ready. If they stand in our way, we'll slaughter them all"

"You're still as bratty as ever" Kanami tucked as Nagakura swung for her head. "I always preferred Kira, to be honest. Much more agreeable"

Kanami laughed. "I'd love to stay and play, but I have other thing to do. Maybe next time I'll bring Kira along. For your benefit" She cast a sidelong glance at Saito. "Sanosuke would be thrilled to see her as she is now. Much prettier than before she died, and stronger too." Kanami stepped forward toward Chizuru, prompting Saito to swing.

She blocked his sword with a sword sheath, swinging out with her left hand and burying her blade in his shoulder.

"I can't play anymore" She smiled. "But I thought you might like this little present from Kira" She dropped the sheath at his feet, turning and vanishing just as quickly as she appeared.

"What's going on!" Chizuru turned as Hijikata ran toward them, Sannan, Heisuke, Harada, and Yamazaki close behind him.

"You were right" Saito stood from his crouched position, bringing the sheath with him. He turned and held it out to Hijikata. "They're alive, both of them"

Chizuru took a look at the sheath, pinkish red in color with black and white ivy patterns lacing up it. It was beautiful and ornate,

something a typical samurai would never carry. The sight of it had caused a flare of panic to cross Harada's face.

"Did...did one of them do this?" Harada looked past Chizuru and Saito to Nagakura. The other man was helping a dazed Okita to his feet.

"Kanami" Nagakura answered for them, his expression hard. "Kira wasn't with her"

"Kanami" Hijikata shook his head sadly. "She killed Gen. That's inexcusable"

"Why would she-" Harada cut himself off as he shared a look with Nagakura.

"It-" Chizuru paused. "It sounded like she was angry...um. Angry at the rest of you"

"What?" Heisuke was confused. "Angry with us for what?"

"She said you left her there to die"

5. Chapter 4

"Kira?" She looked up as Kanami spoke, a furious expression on her face. The darkness surrounded them, leaving candlelight to flicker against their skin as the two girls stared each other down.

"How dare you, Kanami" Kira hissed, her hand still resting on the hilt of her sword.

"Oh relax, I left them a present" Kanami smiled, running a finger through the blood that pooled on her kimono.

"What?" Kira was taken aback as she watched her sister trace the finger up the shaft of her spear, collecting the blood that still dripped from it.

"That silly sheath that goes with the sword you left" Kanami's eyes flickered with resentment.

"My...my sheath?" Kira remembered it clearly. It was one of her favorite possessions, even more treasured than the sword itself. "You gave them that sheath?"

"I did" Kanami nodded, bringing her finger away from the blade and holding it out toward Kira. "This is their blood you know. Shinpachi and Hajime's I mean. I didn't spill Souji's blood, after all. I couldn't bring myself to do it. But them..."

Kira drew the sword in her hand as Kanami brought her finger to her lips, taking the blood from it with a flick of her tongue. "You don't have the right to hurt them, Kanami. No one ordered you to hurt them"

"No. But they got in the way of the objective. I wouldn't have hurt them if they hadn't tried to attack me" Kanami shrugged, enjoying a little smirk as she sucked her finger into her mouth. She released it

with a pop, grinning so that Kira could see the red tint on her teeth. "They taste delicious you know. Especially Hajime." Kanami moved toward her, the same grin on her face. "He tastes like ice and mint. But you never got the chance to experience it for yourself"

"How dare you" Kira swung her sword, not surprised when Kanami blocked it. "You should have never gone there without me"

"I couldn't take the chance that you'd go easy on them." Kanami shrugged. "Though I do think they'd be more cooperative if you were there. You always were able to make that group of idiots go weak in the knees. Especially Sanosuke. I didn't see him while I was there...but if he had found me first" She laughed. "I would have pretended to be you, sister. Just like I wanted to when we were with that insufferable group, though you said it was too improper for me. I could have tasted him in ways you've never dreamed of, Kira"

Bile rose in her throat as the words escaped Kanami's mouth. "I never wanted that" She said with a hiss of disagreement.

"Well I could actually fool him with it. Hajime caught on the minute I tried it with Souji" Kanami frowned. "He recognized that it wasn't me, even without my weapon actually drawn. Shinpachi knew as well, though Souji would have been oblivious."

"Why must you toy with them, Kanami? It's unlike you" Kira held her blade at the ready.

"Because they left us, Kira. They left us to die" Kanami hissed.

"If they had been there, they would have done everything they could to save us" Kira shook her head. "You knew that, when we walked into the battle, Kanami. There was always the chance that we'd die there"

"We died because they were incompetent." Kanami, held her spear, ready to attack her sister. "You died because of them. I died afterwards of course, but thanks to Koudou we have the chance to take our vengeance." She smiled. "We could slaughter them all, Kira. We could take Kaoru along and let him see what his blood has done to us. We could slit their throats one by one"

"I don't want them to die, Kanami. You know that" Kira quickly blocked the swipe from Kanami's spear. "I want them to be able to live. I wanted them to live without knowing we were alive"

"You should have seen Souji's face, Kira" Kanami laughed maliciously. "He looked like he'd seen a ghost." She pouted. "And he called me a bitch. Can you believe that?"

"I can" Kira kept her gaze as even as she could. "Especially if this is how you were acting."

"Go back to them then, Sister" Kanami tucked her spear back into the holding sheath at her back. "But remember, Kira. When I come around you'll have to decide. Will it be me..." Kanami walked past her, pausing with a whisper just loud enough for Kira to hear. "Or them"

6. Chapter 5

Hajime saw the pair of them in Chizuru. He saw the blind determination that had filled Kanami's eyes over and over. He saw Kira, a small smile playing on her face as she held the blade to Souji's throat, and the relentless drive she had to help anyone and everyone around her. He especially saw Kanami in the restless way Chizuru paced when she couldn't sleep on nights like these. He'd been watching her for at least an hour, doubting she sensed his presence lingering in the shadow of the doorway, or even Souji's as he crouched close to her position. That was where the similarities ended. Kira would have known they were there. Kanami would have drawn her weapon in a panic arc the minute she noticed Souji so close.

"Reminds you of them, huh?" Sanosuke's voice was gentle as he leaned against the wall beside Hajime. "I'll admit, Kanami was something like her when she was younger. But I don't think she holds a candle to Kira at this stage. She would have already slit Souji's throat and be after ours"

"You may be right" Hajime nodded. "But She's determined. That's enough to remind me of back then..."

"You can't blame yourself, Hajime" Sanosuke sighed, crossing his arms over his chest. "We were separated by an order. They got unlucky. You said it yourself, it looked like Kira had been badly injured before the battle was even over. If we had gotten to her she would have just died anyway. At least now...she's alive"

"She's alive and may be our enemy" Hajime interrupted. "I don't know what your opinion on the matter is, but I doubt I could swing a sword at her without regret. Kanami maybe, but not Kira. Not when I taught her to use the blade she's swings with."

"Have some faith in her, Hajime" Sanosuke rubbed the back of his head. "We already knew Kira was more cooperative than Kanami from the start. She came to you to learn, and she looked up to you. I doubt she'd willingly kill any of us, we were all her family after Kondou took them in."

"I hope you are correct in the statement, Sano" Hajime said as he turned his attention back to Chizuru. "I could not cut her down as easily as I would anyone else. She means far too much"

"Never thought I'd see you get so worked up over a girl, Hajime" Sanouske grinned wolfishky, his humor returning instantly. "Kira should be flattered."

They looked up as Souji gave himself away, causing Chizuru to panic and fall. Souji caught her, arms moving around her waist to keep her in place. "He planned that" Sanosuke muttered to himself as their fellow captain set Chizuru on her feet with his typical smirk.

"Idiot" Hajime shook his head as Souji ducked his head in close to their charge, his nose nearly brushing hers as he said something neither of them could hear.

Chizuru blushed at his words, scurrying away as he cupped her cheek in his hand. He smiled as he watched her go vanishing into another room. "Why don't the two of you come out so we can have a little chat" Souji called into the darkness, his eyes shifting to their hiding place. Hajime left first, joining him in the center of the courtyard with Sanosuke in tow.

"Why'd you have to make Chizuru panic like that?" Sanosuke asked in a hushed laugh.

From the right, Shinpachi dropped down from the roof. He righted himself quickly, joining them in the center. Hajime didn't like the tight expression on his face, nor the tenseness of his body as he joined them. The other captain was crossing both arms over his chest, an irritated look flickering through her eyes.

"I suppose you've figured it out already" Souji sighed. "Our precious Demon Commander has given an order to instate temporary replacements for the Captains who will be hurrying off on this little errand"

"Errand?" Sanosuke's eyes narrowed.

"He's sending the four of us after Koudou" Shinpachi's statement explained the dark look on his face.

"We're going to be told to eliminate Doctor Yukimura and take out all that would oppose us. Including Kira and Kanami" Souji nodded grimly.

"When are we leaving?" Hajime sighed. He'd hoped this order would have come later rather than sooner.

"Tomorrow night. Kondou wants Heisuke to go with us, precaution against Kondou's furies and all" Souji's eyes flashed. "Heisuke will return at dawn. We continue on to finish the mission"

"So it's coming down to this. Hijikata is giving us a direct order to kill them" Sanosuke shook his head sadly.

"No." Hajime interrupted. "They must only die if they stand in our way"

"Hopefully Kira is still smarter than her sister, eh?" Shinpachi asked dryly. "Maybe she can avoid dying a second time"

The thought weighed heavy on Hajime's mind as he left their company and proceeded to return to his room. He found her sheath and sword in the center of the floor, just as he left it. It was inviting and warm as ever as he sat next to it, tracing the ivy with his fingers. He remembered her doing this often, just sitting and trailing patterns up her sheath as she spoke. When Shinpachi had asked, Kira had said it was calming to know that something so beautiful was the only defense she had against an attack. She'd laughed when Hajime had mentioned the dagger she kept hidden under her dress. "It takes you to notice, Hajime. It always does" She'd been cheerful in her response, but they'd all sensed a hidden edge under the typically sweet ring of her voice.

He took the sheath in his hands, drawing her sword from it. It was

just as he remembered it, nearly weightless as she needed it to be to fight one handed. Hajime and the other captains had scolded her endlessly about her blows not being powerful enough. They'd only convinced her once to spar with two hands on her sword. It was the first time she lost to her sister. After that day, one hand had been all she needed. They still scolded her, and she still chose to ignore them. It was only when he picked up the blade for the first time, the day she supposedly died, that he'd realized why she only fought one handed. The blade had been made lighter than your average katana, a weapon perfect for one-handed wielding. She could swing it quickly as her attack or defense, and then lunge in with the hidden dagger. Her fighting style was fitting of Yamazaki, not a young, skinny, girl with a cold demeanor and silver eyes that sparkled vividly.

But she wasn't a child anymore, nor was she the girl he'd taught despite their opposite in which hand they drew with. Hajime had taught her everything he knew, leaving it to Shinpachi to teach her the parts he couldn't. Their combined mentor-ship had resulted in the strange compilation of two styles Kira fought with. Whereas Kanami tried to mirror Sanosuke as much as she could, Kira branched out to create her own technique. She even fared a reasonable chance against Hijikata on a good day. He could still remember the bright shine to her eyes as she held her blade in position. The way those silvery eyes glittered when she defeated Souji for the first time and then again when she lost to Heisuke directly after it. He'd never directly tested her skill, he was afraid to hurt her. But he'd witnessed enough not to worry when she and Kanami were off by themselves.

Candlelight glittered off the surface of the sword as he turned it, the blunt edge facing away from him in the dim lighting. One blue eye reflected back at him, showing the care they'd given to her blade even after six years. They'd cleaned the wrappings around it and retied the tassel when it was free of blood. Hijikata had resharpened the blade when it dulled, and each of the captains had practiced with the light blade to keep it in use. The same could be said for Kananmi's spear, though the cracked blade had to be replace immediately.

Hajime swung the blade outward, hearing it slash through empty air with a satisfying swish. The girl was stuck in his mind, memories of her replaying over and over. The boldest was back in Kondou's dojo. The two girls had just joined and were already training. Souji had been relentless in his teaching, infuriating Kanami more than once. However, he'd quickly found it impossible to coax a reaction out of the older of the twins. He'd left Kanami to her training and focused on finding Kira's weak-point, despite several lectures from Kondou. She'd ignore him for months until the rainy day she'd been disarmed in a spar. Sanosuke's foot had slipped in the slick mud and the blade of his spear jolted forward, cutting a clean line into Kanami's upper arm.

Souji had made the comment that she wasn't a real samurai because she couldn't even protect her own sister.

She'd hit him, hard. It was the first time any of them could remember seeing her cry. Her hand clenched around nothing, eyes focused downward and her bangs falling to cover them. It was also the first time they heard Souji apologize to one of the twins. He'd even offered to help her with the defensive move she'd missed when

sparring Sanosuke. She'd ignored him and retrieved her sword, taking care to wipe the mud and water from it and dry it efficiently.

Hajime sighed again leaning his head and back against the wall behind him. How was it that after so many memories with the two of them, they could just vanish because of one mistake? He hadn't wanted to leave without finding them, though they'd had too many priorities to worry about at the time. Yamakazi had kept a close eye out for any information on the twin girls, but none came through. Not until the day Kondou had barged into the common room, that terrible look on his face. He wished they hadn't been visited by Kanami. He could pretend Kira was dead and keep her from sticking in his head like this.

"Kira" He mumbled to himself, looking out at the star-filled sky.
"Wherever you are...please. Forgive me again"

7. Chapter 6

Souji sighed as he walked, refusing to entertain the jealousy that sprang from Harada's proximity to Chizuru. It had been months since Kanami appeared, months without incident involving either of the twins. But Hijikata still refused to let the girl walk anywhere without an escort. The day before it had been Shinpachi and Heisuke, today he'd been shoved in to replace Saito. Frankly he thought Harada could babysit by himself, besides the fact that coming into the country like this was hardly productive as a protection measure. But it made her happy, and that was what really mattered.

"Are you okay, Okita?" Chizuru's voice drew his eyes to hers, taking in the worried expression on her pretty face.

"I'm fine" He let a smile slip onto his face long enough for her to turn back to the patch of wildflowers she'd been enamored with. Harada was standing stiffly next to her, his own eyes turned toward the woods ahead of them.

Souji's eyes followed his, scanning the treeline for whatever had caught his interest. The space between the trees was dark and foreboding, easy for an enemy to hide in. It was a little closer than he would have liked, but they should have been suitably far enough away to escape should that be the case. The field behind them was open, and they'd barely left the main path. With the citizens and soldiers that regularly used the road, there shouldn't have been so much concern in Harada's face.

"Look to the far left" Harada's words were barely audible but Souji caught their meaning immediately. He slid his eyes to the general area Harada had indicated, being sure to keep his form relaxed to avoid startling Chizuru. His eyes instantly caught the offending presence, a spot near the very edge of the trees that seemed just a little darker than the rest. It could have been Saito or Yamazaki, both were skilled enough to conceal themselves. But experience told Souji that the two men would have been watching their backs rather than scouting ahead. Something was amiss.

"Perhaps we shouldn't go too far today, Chizuru" Souji suggested as he kept his eyes trained on the spot.

"Hm?" Chizuru looked up at him curiously. "Okay"

The shadowed spot moved just as Chizuru, darting forward. The movement was enough to prompt Harada into shoving Chizuru behind him and drawing his spear. Souji watched carefully, his own sword drawn, as two figures removed themselves from the trees. There was an audible catch in Harada's breathing as they revealed themselves.

"How surprising a coincidence for us to meet here, hm?" Souji's eyes narrowed as Kanami spoke, her eyes flickering with the same malice she'd shown before.

Kira was with her this time, standing slightly off to the right and a few steps back. Whereas Kanami had drawn her weapon, Kira kept her sword safely sheathed at her sides. Her eyes were darkened, clearly finding the situation distasteful. Souji was surprised to see that even in six years, the girl in front of him hadn't even bothered to alter her appearance. Though her hair was a little longer, she still let it hang loose with only the sides tied back in a single stream he knew would be tied in a braid at the back of her head. The form fitting black dress, adopted from a shinobi clan, still exposed her legs. Her sword was still hung at the left side and he could see the black point of another sheath when the light breeze rustled her clothing.

"Kira" He glanced in Harada's direction as the whisper escaped the other man's mouth. His grip on the spear had slackened as he watched her.

"Hello, Sanosuke" Kira's voice was unaltered, though something had changed.

What the hell is so different? The thought crossed his mind as he scanned her again. Kira was cold as ever, her voice unfazed by whatever emotion she was hiding behind stoic silver eyes. Eyes...The realization snapped in his brain. Kira was avoiding looking Harada in the eye, though she'd had no problem with it before.

"I brought her along as promised" Kanami snickered. "Though it seems I lied to Saito. He would have enjoyed seeing you, hm Kira?" Kanami wasn't bothered by her sister's lack of response, brushing it off with a sneer as she continued. "Though Harada is here, so we've struck at least one nerve."

"Do what we came here for and let's go" The sound was uncharacteristically harsh for having come from Kira's mouth.

"Impatient as always" The comment slid through Souji's lips without his approval, shifting Kira's eyes to him.

"And you're still irritably impulsive" For a moment there was a flicker of amusement in Kira's face before she slid back into her icy demeanor.

"Come now, that's not very nice of you, sister." Kanami's posture changed dramatically as she glared at Kira. "We should be grateful that Souji isn't as speechless as Harada"

"We aren't here to speak to them" Kira responded sharply.

"Ah right" Kanami shrugged. "We need to talk to Chizuru. I'd forgotten"

"M-Me?" Chizuru squeaked. She took a step back, moving out of Souji's field of vision. He tightened his grip on his sword, moving slightly to the right to position himself in front of her.

"Oh please, Souji" Kanami rolled her eyes as she saw him move. "If I wanted to hurt her, Kira wouldn't be here right now, now would she?" She snickered to herself at the scowl he sent her way. "Think about it, hm? Kira never wanted to hurt anyone right? She was the sweet, stoic, little angel"

"Kanami" Kira's voice hid a warning as her sister laughed to herself.

"Kira" The younger of the twins replied with an even smile. "I'm only discussing our past with him. I thought it might be nostalgic." She brightened as if she'd had a brilliant idea. "Oh I know! We should have covered you in blood before we came! It would really give them a glimpse of your final moments." If Harada had been pale before, he was translucent now.

"Kanami, shut your mouth before I shut it for you" Souji's thought process faltered for a moment as Kira abandoned her sly undertones and allowed the threat to fully settle in her words.

Kanami was taken aback, clearly unprepared for her sister's sudden fury. Kira moved closer, her presence nudging Kanami out of the way as she positioned herself directly in front of them. Her eyes settled on Chizuru, voice empty as she spoke. "Chizuru. Your father has sent us to give you the chance to come willingly. Though this may seem less than appealing, I strongly suggest you leave with us now. For your sake and theirs"

Souji's ears caught what Chizuru's did not. Regret. The emotion only lingered in Kira's eyes for a moment, flitting away to be replaced with mild disinterest and boredom. She refused to even spare a glance at either himself or Harada, focusing only on Chizuru through subtle effort. Whatever this was, it was eating at Kira's self-consciousness. He knew from experience how to tell when something was eating at her, though his comprehension of it was altered as Kanami snickered again.

"Spare at least a sideways glance to them would you, Kira?" Kanami's voice resonated over them. "Look at poor Harada. You're so horribly frosty"

"I can't...I just-" Chizuru was mumbling to herself.

"Very well." Kira ignored her sister and focused on Chizuru. "Be prepared, Chizuru"

"Oh just move and let me handle this myself" Kira was pushed to the side as Kanami strode forward, spear already moving in a technique Souji had seen from Harada many times before. He barely had time to move his sword as the blade was stopped.

Kira had drawn her sword in a flash worthy of comparison to Saito's. The expression on her face could freeze water as she moved forward, seizing Kanami by the collar of the kimono she wore. Souji and Harada took an instinctive step back.

"What did I say about needless bloodshed" Kira hissed in disapproval, using her hold on Kanami's collar to shove the younger girl backwards. Kanami stumbled and caught herself, eyes flaring wide in shock. "I'll be sure to mention your careless need to senselessly swing that stupid thing around while in her presence, Kanami. You should know better." Kira's gaze didn't lighten its weight as Kanami scowled. "Now go." She shook her head. "I expected better of you"

Kanami faltered for a moment. "If you say so, dear sister." She turned to look at Chizuru. "If you'll excuse my leave" The words were dripping with sarcasm as she walked away, form vanishing into the dark outline of the trees.

Souji's eyes narrowed as Kira sighed. Her eyes turned toward him, regret sparkling underneath the surface as she looked at them. "I'm so sorry" He didn't move as Kira turned to walk away.

"Kira, wait" Both Souji and Chizuru were startled as Harada's hand shot forward, catching her sword arm in his grip.

Kira looked panicked as he turned her head toward him, body going taught as Harada gave her a hard look.

"What is it?" Her voice wavered near the end, her eyes flitting away to focus anything other than him. She pulled away, trying to free her arm.

"Why are you doing this" Harada insisted, refusing to let her get away. "This isn't like you"

"Maybe I'm not me anymore" The words were just above a whisper as she said them.

"Kira..." Souji could hear the concern in Harada's voice as he lifted his other hand, affectionately touching her cheek.

Kira flinched away, her sudden movement startling Harada into letting go. "I'm sorry...I really-" She broke off as she turned and fled toward the woods with speed Souji didn't think possible.

They waited in silence after she'd gone. He was floundering for an explanation to the events, mentally cursing himself as the answer slipped from his fingers. In his processing he failed to notice the tears rolling fluidly down Chizuru's cheeks as she clasped her hands over her mouth, keeping herself from outright sobbing. Harada was first to notice, drawing Souji's attention as he said her name gently.

"She..." Chizuru couldn't be consoled as she struggled to speak. "She looked so sad"

Souji and Harada shared a look, their expressions mirroring one another as Chizuru moved. Souji was stunned as she grabbed his hand

in one of hers, taking Harada's in the other.

"We have to help her. Please" She begged.

They could only nod through the shocked confusion.

8. Chapter 7

Kira kicked her feet out, raising one so that it was silhouetted against a square of blue sky. She was sprawled in the grass on her back, sword and sheath laying just to her right. She'd done this countless times, both in her former life and the current one. Before her death it had been something she took pleasure in; an activity Kira would often invite Harada and Hajime along for. Now it was just to remind herself that she wasn't dead.

"Kira, this is stupid. We should be doing what Koudou asked us to" Kanami's voice broke the sound of nature as she stood just within her sister's field of vision.

"Kanami" Kira said slowly, turning her head to study the maze of grass beside her. "Why did this have to happen to us?"

"What are you going on about this time? If it's those stupid Shinsengumi again-" Kanami cut herself up as Kira laid her fingers against the hilt of her sword. The younger girl watched as her sister slowly drew the weapon from it's sheath. The older of the two girls sat up, drawing a precise finger along the dull side of her blade. Her eyes were distant and hazy. "Kira? What is it this time?"

"I don't want to do this anymore, Kanami" Kira smiled softly at her sister before turning back to the sword.

'What does that even mean" Kanami's words were meant to be sharp, but they fell flat as Kira moved.

With a careful movement, Kira pressed the pad of her thumb against the blade's honed edge. Scarlet spilled out from the skin, leading a path down the blade and into the hilt Kira held on to. She barely winced as she held her thumb up as if testing to see if she really could bleed. Kanami gulped. It wasn't common for Kira to fall on this side of the line, but when she did it was dangerous.

"I'm going for a walk. Kanami, watchn over this place and do as Koudou asks you too. But don't hurt anyone you don't absolutely have to." Kira stood up, attaching the sword and its sheath to her hip. "And remember Kanami. What we are is unnatural. You cannot change that, nor should you try"

Kanami watched numbly as her sister left the open field.

9. Chapter 8

Harada leaned against the support beam, his cheek resting against the palm of his hand as he watched the commotion in the garden. He'd just returned that morning from the search mission Kondou assigned them with no real reason. Chizuru hadn't been happy with several of the captains vanishing for a week with no word about where they were.

Souji and Saito had already been chewed out twice by the fiery demon. He himself had avoided it do to the slight injury on his left hand, but it wouldn't last for long. Sooner or later her warpath would reach his particular corner of semi-silence.

At the moment, he could care less anyway. It was a growing trend since that day in the field. Before then he'd wanted nothing more than to write the others off as crazy. Harada had been perfectly capable of managing the fact that Kira and her sister were dead. There was nothing he could do about that, and there were no tricky corners to cross if they were just non-existent. But his denial had ended the moment he'd grabbed her arm. When he'd lurched forward, Harada had expected many things. Cold, dead flesh, chilled air, an illusion that was haunting a constant nightmare.

But Kira had been real. His fingers had met warm, smooth skin. Her pulse had been present, just underneath the surface and speeding up when he'd touched her. He'd caught a hint of the same combination of hibiscus flowers and grass that had been so familiar six years before. Even as much as he wanted to, Harada couldn't just erase that out of his head. Kira and Kanami were real, very real. And for whatever twisted reason they seemed to be working against the Shinsengumi.

"Harada? Are you alright?" Shinpachi emerged from the headquarters, his face concerned as he found his teammate.

"I'm fine, Shin. Just thinking" Harada shook his head, pushing himself to his feet. "I think I'll go for a quick walk in the woods. Let Hijikata know for me, okay?"

"Sure" Shinpachi said in a stunned tone as Harada walked away from him.

Harada knew that most of the Shinsengumi didn't like how close the forest was to them this far out. There were far too many opportunities for ambush here, and all of them knew it. But Kondou had chosen it for seclusion, not open terrain. They'd moved into the old, abandoned temple as a precaution against the demons that were intent on capturing Chizuru. He'd spent hours going over this area with Heisuke and the others, making sure the temple was the only standing building anywhere in the trees. It had been a good report, but his going out would still be chalked up to a quick scan of the area.

"Damn" Harada looked up at the trees around him. He had walked further than he'd intended to go, ending up in place he didn't recognize. They'd left little markers to guide the newbies who'd get lost, but he didn't even see one of them as he looked around. "What the he-" Harada jumped as he felt slender arms wrap around his shoulders. The weight of someone's head leaned against his. He slipped into panic as several strands of lilac colored hair fell across his shoulder.

"I'm not trying anything if that's what you're worried about." It was Kira, her voice soft as she barely whispered in his ear. "My sword and daggers are lying over there on the stone. You may check if you want"

Harada spun as her arms left his shoulders, finding the girl sitting

on a low-hanging branch of a huge momiji tree. She wasn't even focused on him as he took a step back, her eyes diverted somewhere to his right. Something seemed off as she turned her typically pretty silver eyes on him. They were dull this time, lacking the shimmer of hidden emotion or even an obvious one.

"Kira...what are you-" She cut him off by standing up.

"I need you to do something for me, Sanosuke" Kira crossed her arms tightly across her chest, hugging herself.

"Need me to do what?" He was still too stunned to fully process what was happening. All he consciously knew was that she was standing there in front of him, something was off about her, and she'd left her weapons fully out of reach. Too out of reach for this to be any form of consciously stable Kira.

"I..." She choked on whatever words wanted to slip from her mouth. "I don't want to be this anymore, Sanosuke"

"Be what?" He asked cautiously as the air around her tensed.

"Dead but not dead. Breathing without deserving the breath" Her eyes met his, intensity filling them. "I'm tired of being this horrible creature. I didn't want this, no matter how much he pushed it toward us. When it came down to it I had no choice but to take the blood. I didn't want to" A single tear slipped down her cheek as she pinched at a scar on her left arm.

"Wait..." He paused. "Kira do you want-"

"I want you to kill me" She nodded. "I don't care if it's you or Hajime, or even Hijikata. I just want to die. I didn't want this second chance the way Kanami did. These forms were born from her spite, not mine. I just don't want to do this anymore."

"Kira no" Harada started as a voice joined them. He glanced over his shoulder, finding Souji just behind him. "No one is going to willingly kill you. You mean too much to them...to us..for that"

"Souji" Kira sighed, her eyes empty again. "I already died once. What does it matter if I die again?"

"It matters because you have the chance to finish what you started" Harada stayed quiet as Souji glared at the young woman in front of them. "You can do what you will with whatever opportunity the gods give you. Don't you remember that?"

She remained quiet, watching Souji apprehensively.

"You were the one that said it. After Kanami saved some stupid rabbit that Heisuke was going to kill. She let it go, but it wouldn't leave remember? The stupid thing just kept following her around, even though Heisuke kept going at it. When she got frustrated...she was going to kill it herself. But you told her that it's choice only belonged to the rabbit and no one else. That each person must do what they will with the opportunity they're given."

Kira's arms tightened around herself as she let her apprehension fade

away, replacing it with a frosty shell. "I'm dead Souji. The gods didn't give me the opportunity to live like this. Koudou did, and I hate him with every part of this fake existence I have"

"It isn't fake if you're here, Kira" Souji snapped.

"I should go" She turned and reached for her sword.

"Kira no" Harada reached forward, grabbing her right arm and tugging her toward him. Before she could wrench herself away he had his arms around her. "You don't have any requirement to go back to him. Or to Kanami"

"But I do, Sano" She sighed. To his surprise she didn't jerk away as she did last time.

"You can come back to the others, Kira. Not one person there would be resentful of that. In fact, you'd just be giving them another reason to drink" Souji had crossed his arms over his chest. "And we could use your insight on how to handle Koudou's new furies"

Kira tensed as Harada pulled away from her. She looked toward her sword, reaching out for it. Harada and Souji tensed, sure she would take the sword and attempt to run them both through with it. Instead she took the blade, drawing it across her palm with a quick slash. Blood spilled down the blade and onto the rock beneath it, staining the daggers too before she knocked them to the ground. They fell among the shrubbery, nearly lost from sight until you were practically standing on top of them.

Harada smiled as she looked back at them. "Let's go home, Kira"

10. Chapter 9

Kanami bit her lip as she watched out the window, rolling her spear in between her fingers. Kira had been gone for a full day now, and no one but her seemed to pay any mind. The others were used to this. Kira would get depressed, leave for days on end, and come back with another sad expression that she'd hide away just when she thought Kanami hadn't seen it. It was an endless cycle for the two of them. Kanami embraced her change with vigor and energy while Kira wilted under it. Koudou said she was the stronger of the two twins, but Kanami knew better. Kira was just a little sad, but she'd get better. She always would.

"Kanami. Father says you can't just stare out the window every time Kira decides to go off on her own" Kanami's head turned as Kaoru broke the silence. "It isn't like she hasn't done this before. Kira will be back in a few days. A week at the most. She always comes back, she has nowhere else but here"

"Yes..." Kanami looked back to the mist that was settling over the laboratory. It was as foreboding as her sister's sudden disappearance. "She always tells me when she's leaving. This time feels different"

Kaoru scoffed, turning his back on her and walking away. She remained in the little perch, watching the treeline for her sister. Kanami

didn't act like it, but she missed Kira when she went off on these little adventure. Kira was the one thing that tore Kanami in two. One part wanted her sister to embrace the life they'd been given, to revel in it the way she did. They were stronger, faster, better adapted this way. Not quite human but not quite demon either. The other part just wanted the same older sister she'd always had.

But lately Kira didn't want the same things she did. They'd survived six years following Koudou's orders, and so far there had been no complications. He made sure they were kept hidden from the things that would threaten them and in exchange all he wanted was his daughter. Chizuru belonged to him the same way Kira belong to Kanami. So when Kira began her ramblings about staying hidden from the Shinsengumi, it had angered Kanami. They were the men that had killed her, and yet she was so willing to turn back and leave them be.

"I can't let that happen. I can't let them hurt her again" Kanami's hand tightened around the spear in her lap. It didn't matter how many times Kira walked away from her, searching for whatever it was that she wanted. Kira was her sister, her older sister. The one that had died protecting her because the Shinsengumi couldn't. If they'd been capable of that, Kira wouldn't have died and they'd still be happy together. Kira wouldn't wish for death so often, nor would she leave Kanami alone to fend for herself.

Kanami closed her eyes, trying to remember what it had been like when they were happy like that. When she and Kira were more than content to spend their days in the company of samurai too snarky for their own good. Even when they were children they'd separated into their own cliques. Kira had crowded Saito and Shinpachi day after day while Kanami had busied herself with training and fending for herself. Souji had been particularly merciless when they were around. He'd wait until Kira had disappeared with the others before he'd start in on her. Criticizing her style with a weapon he didn't even know how to fight with. But he always apologized to her when the others weren't around.

"gah" She threw the spear across the room, embedding the blade into the wall where is struck. Anger was a common factor in these memories. She'd never seen the Shinsengumi the way Kira had. Her sister had grown to care about all of the captains as if they were her own family, while Kanami had never seen the need to be closer to anyone but Souji. It was needless, wasteful. She never wanted to have fun or play the games Kanami suggested. Everything was right and proper about Kira back then. And death hadn't changed anything but her sister's will to live.

A hissing sound brought Kanami out of her train of thought. A fury, one of Koudou's newest brand, was crouched in the corner. His red eyes glinted with malice as he looked at her. He was Jinjugi. One of the few furies that had survived multiple tests and serums. He knew both Kira and Kanami personally, having been with them for nearly four of the six years they'd been with Koudou.

"What do you want?" She snapped at him, willing the idiot to go away. The furies enjoyed teasing them, going so far as to dub them as the Akuma no Futago, Demon Twins.

"She won't return" He hissed, tongue slipping between his lips grossly. "The older wants to die while the younger yearns to live.

Yin and Yang. Night and Day. Death and Life"

It cackled at the scowl on Kanami's face. "What would you know about my sister, creature."

"You will be sono pea no nai futago. One without its pair. Lost. Forsaken. Shinda ga, shinde inai" It hissed in return.

"Kira won't leave me. We can't die, not again. She knows that" Kanami held her straight face, though a sinking feeling had settled in her stomach.

"You shall see Fantomu" Jinjugi cackled again, rocking back and forth in his corner. "She has tried, little one. The big one has tried many ways to die in this second life. Drowning, jumping, hanging, stabbing. It never works. She always comes back more tattered than the last"

"Shut up" Kanami refused to look at the creature, clenching her fist and staring out the window again. Of course she knew Kira had tried to kill herself. But she was only experimenting. Kira would never leave her alone, not after all they'd been to.

"You'll see. You'll see"

"I SAID SHUT UP" Kanami grabbed the kitchen knife from a nearby table, throwing it across the room as hard as she could. The utensil hit the fury in the shoulder, ripping a terrible screech from its mouth as it curled on the floor.

It wasn't the first time Kanami had maimed for the deed of soiling her sister's name.

And it certainly wouldn't be the last.

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>Japanese-English translations

>Akuma no futago- _Demon Twins_

Sono pea no nai futago- _One without it's pair_

Shinda ga, shinde inai- _Dead but not dead _

Fantomu-_ Phantom_

11. Chapter 10

Souji was undeniably irate when everyone had invited Kira back with open arms. He'd expected no less from them, though. If anything the members of the Shinsengumi's captains excelled at ignoring the important parts. Not one of them commented on Kira's request, not even Harada. It was incredibly infuriating that Kira wanted to die so much, to leave her younger sister alone in the hands of a doctor bent on destruction. He thought her motives would have been in question, but it was becoming apparent that everyone was too head over heels for Kira Ojikashi for anyone to notice Kanami's absence.

Even now she was sitting by herself in the main garden of the old temple. She'd apparently slipped away from Sannan's tests and

questions that had been going on for the week and a half that she'd been with them. Kira didn't appear to even notice his presence sitting in the tree next to her position. Souji had been arguing with himself for at least an hour, musing over the thought of scolding her when no one else would.

"You can say it you know, Souji. I know I deserve it even though they tell me over and over that I don't" Kira's words startled him out of his silence as he looked down at her.

"I have no idea what you're talking about" He tucked his arm behind his head and leaned back, deciding to leave her to her self-pity.

"You're thinking the same thing, Souji. I know you well enough to recognize it." Kira sighed, leaning her head back to look up at Souji. "I'm a terrible sister"

"Continue, please." Souji made sure the tone was as snarky as he wanted it to be. "I won't stop you"

"You hate me, and I understand that. I shouldn't have let it get so bad" Souji wondered if she knew Saito, Harada, and Nagakura were so close, spread out along the walls of the temple. He didn't doubt Sannan had sent them to watch her when she'd gotten away.

"Let what get so bad?" He baited her, willing the others to see that Kira wasn't their perfect little plaything anymore.

"Her. Kanami. Something snapped when it happened. I don't know what it was...but sometimes it feels like she isn't my little sister anymore." Kira turned her eyes away from him. "I tried you know. That day. I lied to her about how much it hurt so that I could make sure she was the one that came back. I wanted to make sure she survived when I wasn't going to"

"I don't follow, Kira. We were told you died protecting her" Souji turned carefully on the branch so he could look at her.

"I was going to die before I stepped in front of that stupid sword" Kira scoffed. "I was already dying. The gash in my side would have killed me whether I gave her that extra chance or not. But it didn't matter. I bought her a few days...but I didn't do enough"

"Days?" That caught Souji's attention.

"Yes" Kira looked up, confused. "Kanami died three days after I did, Souji. She never told me how she died...but...Koudou took longer reviving her than me."

"Three days..." Souji mumbled. "How did we not know for three days"

"You thought we died together?" A small smile slipped onto Kira's face. "That was a luxury we didn't have...a luxury I wish we could have so that this wouldn't be happening. She could still just be my sister instead of whatever she is now"

"Why does she hate us" Souji found himself blurting out the question before he could stop himself.

"She thinks you killed us" Kira drew her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them. "I don't know what she meant. But as soon as she was conscious she went off, raving about how it wasn't fair and that she trusted you. She said that we'd have lived if we'd had help. Or if someone had found us. I didn't deny it...she was too beyond reason. And then when she calmed down she just started sobbing out of nowhere...over you Souji"

"Me?" He raised an eyebrow at her.

"Yes. You were the only one outside of the two of us that she ever really bothered with. Relationships were boring to her. She didn't see sense in making friends if you had a twin. But you, you were something interesting. She didn't want to play her games when she was around you. Never once tried pretending to be me to trick you like she did to the others." Kira's hair blew over her shoulder with a rogue breeze.

Souji smirked at the memory, remembering the many times Kanami had fooled the others. She and Kira were polar opposites but Kanami knew how to play the part perfectly. How to give the same disinterested glance Kira did and then flip it around and turn back into herself just in time for Kira to be mistaken for her. It was priceless to watch, even more so as the two of them got older when it became painfully obvious who was who.

"Granted the games shouldn't have worked with you being so frosty all the time" He jibed.

She gave him a hard look, turning back toward the particular bush she'd apparently been studying.

"Souji?" Kira asked quietly.

"Yeah?"

"If you get the chance...leave me and save her"

12. Chapter 11

"Are you stupid, Kanami?" The girl winced as Koudou walked in a circle around her, his eyes filled with disgust. "Do you honestly think your sister is coming back?"

"Kira wouldn't just leave me" Kanami protested weakly. "She's found something interesting...that's all. Just like last time."

"Oh Kanami" He shook his head, finally stopping in front of her, a few paces away. "Kira is not returning, not to this lab nor any others." His cold eyes met hers. "Do you know why?"

She refused to give any response, choosing to stare blankly back at him instead. Koudou smirked, his expression colder than ever.

"Chances are...Kira has finally found a way to end her existence, Kanami. Your sister has left you, and the most likely cause is she found a way to end her miserable life" His words were like venom as

he spat them at her.

"That's not true!" Kanami snapped. "She's my sister. I know her"

"Knew her. You knew her once, Kanami. When you were alive, not as you are now." Koudou shook his head, turning back to the table behind him. It was cluttered and cramped, every inch of space filled with vials and substances she couldn't recognize. His fingers closed around a glass phial, holding it up against the light filtering in from a narrow window. "Do you know what this is?"

"No" She said sharply, watching as he turned, the green liquid in hand.

"It's the newest serum in my collection. Too potent for humans and even the furies. It burns up the existing blood too quickly, they'd never survive for the full amount of time to complete the transformation. Even those who've been through five or six serums die within the first day." He closed the distance between them. "But you, Kanami. You are not human nor fury. Your blood is now diluted with the blood of a full demon, and yet the human remains."

"Then aren't we just half demons as well?" Kanami's fist was clenched tightly.

"In a way. But not after this." He held the phial out toward her. "Drink this. When you awake you'll have more power than you've ever dreamed of. Enough to wipe out the Shinsengumi once and for all and avenge your sister's deaths. Both before and after my hard work was squandered on her pathetic excuse to live"

Kanami hesitated, taking the phial after a moment. "Why did you do this to us?" She asked, voice barely above a whisper.

"Because" He stroked a finger along her jawline, forcing her to look at him. "Beauty deserves to be preserved, and both yourself and your sisters are prime examples of what beauty should be" His smile was dangerous as his fingernail dug into the base of Kanami's jaw, causing blood to come to the surface. "It isn't often you come across a pretty face able to wield a weapon with all the force of a man."

Kanami slapped his hand away, stepping back with the phial in hand. "You promise this will help me kill them? Every last one of them?"

"Down to the sniveling captain himself." Koudou sneered.

"Then I'll drink it...but only for Kira." Kanami raised the bottle to her lips, downing the serum inside quickly. The potion burned on the way down, leaving her throat feeling raw and overused. She choked on the foul taste, forcing herself to clamp her jaw shut and fight through the liquid. Her vision swam as she was ushered further into the lab and laid on a cold table. The serum was taking over, changing her body once again.

"All for Kira" She hissed at Koudou, making sure her point was heard. "It's not for you"

13. Chapter 12

Chizuru watched with interest as Saito squared off with the young woman in front of him. She had yet to formally meet Kira as Okita and Heisuke had made it their personal mission to keep Chizuru as far from the other girl as possible. Today they were out on patrol though, and the others didn't seem to mind Kira being in proximity to Chizuru.

Chizuru's attention was snapped back to the sparring in front of her as the sound of clashing metal rang out. Kira had lunged forward, swinging in a short arc for Saito. He'd been too quick for her, catching the sword with his before it could get anywhere near him.

"That's enough you two" Chizuru jumped as Hikikata's voice came from behind her. "One of you will end up hurting the other. Hajime, Kondou wants us both to report to him immediately.

Saito and Kira stepped away from each other, sheathing their swords as Hikikata had instructed. Saito passed Chizuru on his way up the steps, parting from them without a word. Kira, however, drew her sword again, returning to her practice.

"You were holding back" Chizuru said suddenly, drawing the other girl's attention to her. "You were swinging too close to yourself."

Kira studied her for a moment, eyes flashing before she swept her blade outward in the fashion Chizuru expected from her. "You're right"

"Why?" She asked suddenly. "You could have been fighting with everything instead of just matching his sword."

Kira's eyes never left her blade. "If I hadn't held back I would have hurt him, Yukimura. Surely you understand that" She turned toward Chizuru. "I am as human as you are. To swing against him without holding back would be to kill him. And I don't want that"

"You're...you're a demon? Like me?" Chizuru asked, suddenly curious.

"Hardly" Kira scoffed. "I'm barely more than an advanced version of a fury, made with blood instead of the serum. The only difference being that my life force is not limited, nor am I bound to the night as they are. And as you should have noticed, I appear as human as I did the day I died."

"But you're not dead" Chizuru was confused. "The furies aren't dead either. They just changed"

"You misunderstand, Yukimura" Kira's voice thickened. "I am not a fury nor is there any humanity that remains in my blood. I was fatally wounded in a battle six years ago, yet here I stand. I was run through on the blade of a sword and cut deeply into my side before that. I would have died from blood loss under the care of the best doctors or choked on my own blood before they could send help.

But yet I'm standing here in front of you. Do you understand yet?"

"No" Chizuru gulped.

"I died. There is no doubt about it. When Koudou found me, my heart was not beating. But my veins were warm enough for new blood. He replaced what blood I'd lost in my death with that of your brother's Yukimura. Demon blood beats through my veins as surely as it does through yours, diluted with the fury serum that restarted my heart." Kira said evenly. "I'm not a demon nor am I a human. Not even a fury. My sister and I are not of this earth and never should have existed. In truth I should have remained dead in those trees six years ago. Instead I'm cursed with eternity, neither dying nor truly alive."

Chizuru stared at her in silence, stunned by the revelation she had given. It was true, Kondou had turned two young women into his demons, though they were dead already...he had stolen their 'life' against their wishes...or at least Kira's. Kanami hadn't seemed to mind her new existence.

"You hate it...don't you" Chizuru said quietly, her voice quivering.

Kira's silver eyes turned to her, questioning as they looked over her. "Yes"

"Have you...I mean...did you try..." She swallowed hard.

"To kill myself?" Kira barely blinked at the question. "Yes. There is no way but to kill me with a sword...and even then the blood loss would have to be sudden and violent to keep the skin and bone from regenerating. Koudou wanted weapons...he made sure nothing could go wrong."

"But Kanami..." Chizuru cut herself off as Kira spun violently.

"Don't say her name" She hissed, hand tightening on the hilt of her sword.

"She likes it though" Chizuru pressed forward. "She likes living still."

"The Kanami you saw is not my sister, Yukimura" Kira's eyes turned cold. "That Kanami died six years ago and was resurrected into the spiteful monster you see today. My sister would never wish death upon anyone, not like she does now. She never saw use for mindless killing, more for the fact that it was a waste of a good sword. Now she's soaked in blood, drowning in it and she doesn't care" Kira slashed her sword through the air, the air whistling as she swung. "Kanami can no longer be considered my sister"

"Then you'd kill her?" Chizuru turned as Okita appeared on the steps behind her.

"If I had to" Kira met his gaze angrily.

"I don't believe that and neither do you" Okita shook his head, arms

crossed over his chest. "Kanami is still your sister, despite what grudge she holds...and besides. Who else would you share this 'endless eternity with?'"

"What does any of this have to do with you Souji?" Kira's words were filled with a bite. She sheathed her sword, fingers curling into a fist as she let go of the hilt.

"You always were the bigger hothead, Kira, when it came to Kanami anyway. Don't pretend like you can just ignore that because of whatever you are now" Okita's eyes were as cold as Kira's, and Chizuru was trapped between them.

"And what about you?" Kira snapped. "What are you going to do now that your own blood is poisoned Souji?"

Okita faltered, his eyes flashing as Kira crossed her arms over her chest.

"So I was right" She said. "You know you're sick and yet here you are. Have you even told your sister? Or does she still think you're the healthy, bloodthirsty little brother she always had"

"That has nothing to do with this" Okita said angrily, his hand clenching as he stormed past Chizuru, stopping on the ground a few paces from Kira.

"Oh but it does doesn't it" Kira glared. "How long do you have before the serum kicks in, Souji? And don't lie either. I may not be a full demon but my senses are heightened and I've lived with furies for the past six years. I smelled the taint in your blood the minute you came around the corner. You finally convinced Sannan to give it to you, didn't you? Or did you do it without his knowledge" Okita didn't try to interrupt as Kira continued. "You want to talk to me about intentions? Do you know what happens when a fury turns, Souji? They want blood. You couldn't take it from me, the instinct the change installs would smell the fury in me and decide I was a harder target. Chizuru on the other hand...you wouldn't hesitate to drain her dry, even despite the fact that you're clearly in-"

"Kira I think that's enough" Kondou cut her off as he emerged onto the stairs, looming over Chizuru. "You've given him enough of an earful."

Kira's jaw tightened as she obviously bit her tongue. Chizuru felt trapped in the awkward silence that followed. Though the argument had been ended, Kira and Souji continued to glare at each other; stormy silver eyes meeting dark green ones.

"Yukimura, you should see if Harada will take you on patrol." Kondou's expression was dark as he looked at the two figures in front of him. "Kira, Souji, and I need to talk"

14. Chapter 13

When she woke, it was to the soft click of steel against tile. The sound was distant and muffled, as if it were heard from years away. She could feel the smoothness of stone on her back, it's cold surface leaving shivers on her spine as she opened her eyes. She'd been moved

from the room she'd fallen asleep in.

Kanami swung her legs off the table, reaching out idly to touch her toes against the white stone of the floor. She traced her eyes along the curve of her knee, marveling at her skin. Before it had been unblemished, pale, and smooth to the touch. Now it practically glowed with white light. Kanami had changed, whether for better or worse she could not know.

"Kanami?" A voice echoed along the jagged stone of the walls. She spun, finding Koudou standing in an archway made from white stone. His face was grim as he observed his charge from a distance. "Do you feel different?"

"I feel light. Like there's no weight to anything." Kanami's hand bolted out to catch the hilt of the spear Koudou tossed at her. The smooth wood felt at home in her hands. She spun it in her hand, delighted with the weight of the spear's blade in her hands. She slashed out, pleased with the speed at which she did so.

"Your blood is new, Kanami" Koudou's face spread into a sinister grin. He moved to a worktable in the corner of the room, taking a phial from it.. "You are faster, stronger, more in sync with your surroundings. Kira may have been more skilled with her weapon, but now you're quicker, better suited for your spear and it's balance. You can murder your sister's killers."

"Thirsty. I'm Thirsty" She said, surprised by the silky sound of her voice. "And I want...I want..."

"You want blood." Koudou sounded disappointed. "I thought that might be a side effect. It was practically a miracle that you and Kira didn't need it to begin with. But I guess that was because I made you half demon with Kaoru's blood. This serum made you more like the furies...I thought his blood would have killed off the bloodlust but I must have miscalculated"

"Is that blood" Kanami's eyes focused on the vial in Koudou's hand.

"Mixed with the medicine used to extend a fury's life, yes" He held it up to the light, spinning it in his hand before turning toward her. "I want you to drink it. It should sate you until you're fully aware of your senses."

Kanami eagerly took the vial from him, gulping it down. The thickness of the blood was sublime as it slid down her throat. She frowned when she'd finished it, looking at the empty vial with distaste.

"I want more" She followed him with her eyes as Koudou took the phial and walked back to the worktable.

"Then go take it from a fury. Just don't kill them all" Koudou waved her away.

Her bare feet made little noise as she stepped up next to the worktable. "Fury blood doesn't taste good"

"How would you kn-Kanami?" Koudou had caught her smile from the corner of his eye. She grinned dangerously, her hand reaching out to

touch his neck. Her nails carved deep scratches into the skin. He cried out as she dug her fingers in deeper, blood spilling around then. Koudou slapped her hand away and scrambled toward the doors.

Kanami brought her fingers to her mouth, sucking the warm blood from them. She smiled as Koudou left, dripping blood onto the floor as he left.

She did love it when they ran.

End
file.